

# Spotting lung cancer early campaign

Northern Ireland

March 2024



CANCER RESEARCH UK



Health and Social Care

## Campaign Overview

In September 2022, Cancer Research UK (CRUK) ran a multi-channel early diagnosis advertising campaign for six weeks across Northern Ireland (NI) in partnership with the Public Health Agency and Northern Ireland Cancer Network.

The campaign encouraged the public to contact their GP if they noticed any signs or symptoms of cancer. Following positive results, organisations are once again joining up to launch a follow-up campaign focused on lung cancer symptoms.

### Why is it important to diagnose cancer early?

Reducing the late-stage diagnosis of cancer is one of the key objectives in the Northern Ireland Cancer Strategy. Recent research has shown that 46% of people from more deprived areas in Northern Ireland who reported any potential signs or symptoms of cancer said they did not contact their GP (over a six-month period) [1]. Cancer that's diagnosed at an early stage is more likely to be treated successfully than if it's diagnosed at a late stage, and there'll be more treatment options available. Ultimately, this improves five-year survival for the disease [2].



Early stage diagnosis is more likely to be treated successfully



There'll be more treatment options available when diagnosed early



This improves five-year survival

### Why are we focusing on lung cancer symptoms?

Lung cancer is the second most common cancer in NI [3]. It has the largest number of

people diagnosed at a late stage (stage 4) compared to other cancer types [4]. For people diagnosed at stage 4, only 1% will survive their disease for five years or more, compared to 50% when diagnosed at stage 1 [5].

### Lung cancer survival



Fewer than 1 in 10 people diagnosed at stage 4 will survive their cancer for five years or more.

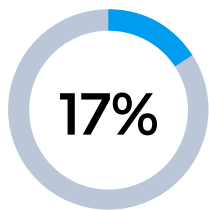


Around 5 in 10 people diagnosed at stage 1 will survive their cancer for five years or more.

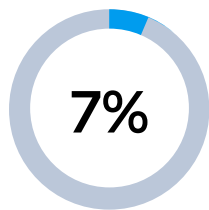
Currently, almost 7 in 10 lung cancer cases diagnosed via emergency presentation are already at stage 4, compared to around 4 in 10 via GP referral [6]. This suggests there is an opportunity to increase early diagnosis of the disease by encouraging people to contact their GP as soon as they notice a change.

There is evidence that stigma around lung cancer can act as a barrier to people contacting their GP practice due to feelings of blame or concerns over the potential interaction with a health professional which can be experienced by people who smoke. People who don't smoke may also be less likely to think their symptoms could be connected to lung cancer [7].

There is also a lack of awareness in the UK of the signs and symptoms of the disease, with only 17% of people citing a persistent cough and 7% breathlessness as potential cancer symptoms. [8].



of people recalling a persistent cough



of people recalled breathlessness

This campaign aims to improve early diagnosis of lung cancer by increasing public awareness of the signs and symptoms of the disease and by encouraging people to contact their GP in a timely manner if they notice any unusual changes in their body.



**When:**  
11 March to 21 April  
2024



**Where:**  
Northern Ireland

### What are we doing and when?

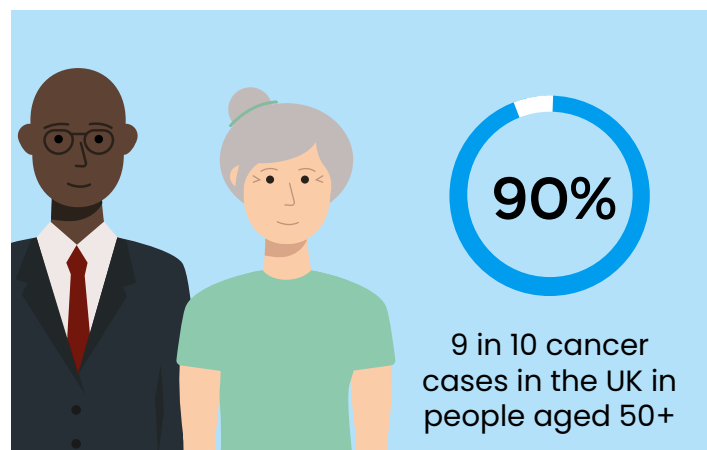
Advertising will feature on TV, radio, out-of-home posters and paid-for social media and digital display, as well as in numerous print publications and in pharmacies. It will also be shared via each of the partner's owned social channels and earned media.



CRUK nurses will visit various workplace and public-facing settings across NI via the charity's Cancer Awareness in the Workplace and Cancer Awareness Roadshow programmes. They'll engage with the public to increase awareness of common signs of lung cancer and promote the importance of early diagnosis.

### Who is the campaign aimed at?

The campaign is aimed at people in NI aged 50 and over from deprived areas. Cancer becomes more common as we age, with 9 in 10 cases in the UK in people aged 50 or over [9].

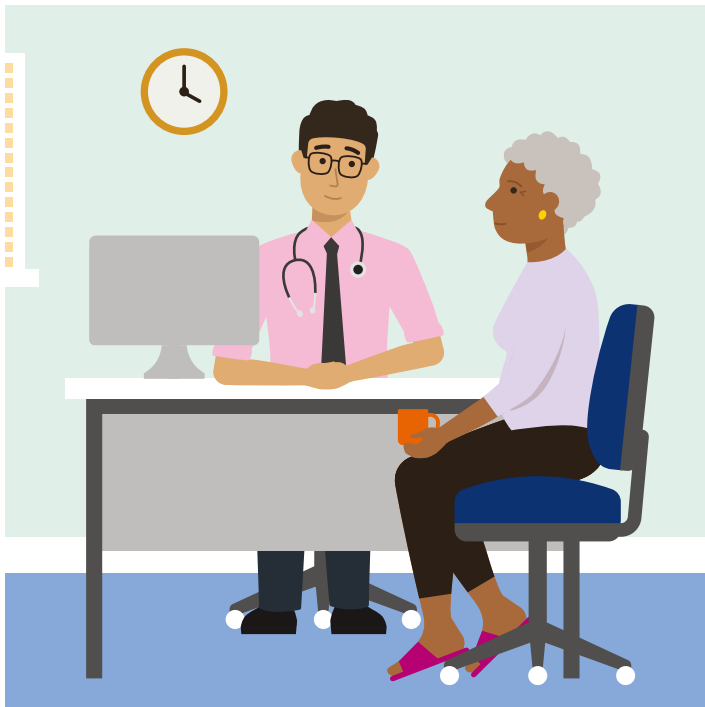


Similarly, populations with higher deprivation have higher prevalence of some cancer risk factors and are less aware of cancer symptoms. They also report more barriers to seeking help.

### Why are we running another campaign in NI?

In August 2021, the Community Foundation Northern Ireland awarded CRUK funding to deliver two public-facing awareness campaigns designed to help improve the early diagnosis of cancer in NI. Following the first campaign in 2022, people with self-reported potential cancer symptoms were more likely to contact a health professional in relation to experiencing symptoms after the campaign compared to before the campaign. 39% of the target audience surveyed reported that they intended to take a positive action after seeing the campaign materials. And of those, 29% did take an action.

We hope to see similar positive intentions, including contacting the GP about an unusual change in their body, especially in relation to potential lung cancer symptoms. Or urging a friend or family member to do so.



## What are the key messages of the campaign?

- Breathlessness or a persistent cough could be signs of lung cancer
- If you've noticed a change in your body that's unusual for you, contact your GP
- Finding cancer early could save your life

## How will we support health professionals?

We'll send briefings with support and guidance to GPs and GP practice staff ahead of the public campaign. We'll also host a webinar on 14 March in partnership with GPNi and the NI Cancer Programme (Legacy NiCaN) for primary care professionals across NI covering topics such as improving referrals, safety-netting and testing.

## How will the campaign be evaluated?

We'll be using the same method as phase 1 of the campaign to allow us to draw comparisons and look at behaviours over an 18-month period. This involves collecting data from members of the public via surveys and interviews, and asking participants about the actions they took in response to the campaign.

## Where are we directing people?

In the first instance, we'll be directing people to contact their GP.

For more information, we will invite them to visit [cruk.org/NorthernIreland](https://cruk.org/NorthernIreland).

This page has been developed especially for the campaign and helps to address the barriers we know people in NI face. It also offers practical support on getting an appointment with a health professional.



- [1] CRUK Cancer Awareness Measure, September 2023
- [2] [NHS England, Cancer Survival in England, cancers diagnosed 2016 to 2020, followed up to 2021](#)
- [3] Data are for 2017-19 and were provided by the Northern Ireland Cancer Registry on request. [Similar data can found here](#)
- [4] Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, Queens University Belfast, 2020 Cancer incidence, survival, mortality and prevalence data | No geographical breakdowns available.
- [5] [Cancers diagnosed 2011-2015, followed up to 2020](#). Northern Ireland Cancer Registry, Queens University Belfast, 2020 Cancer incidence, survival, mortality and prevalence data
- [6] [Northern Ireland: HSC Business Services Organisation](#) (2012-2016 average; breakdown available by HSC Trust, demographics and net survival)
- [7] Scott, Nicola et al. 2015. "Stigma as a Barrier to Diagnosis of Lung Cancer: Patient and General Practitioner Perspectives." *Primary Health Care Research & Development* 16(6): 618-22. doi: 10.1017/S1463423615000043.
- [8] CRUK Cancer Awareness Measure, September 2022 & February 2023.
- [9] Data are for 2017-19 and were provided on request by the National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service (England); ISD Scotland (Scotland); Welsh Cancer Intelligence and Surveillance Unit (Wales); Northern Ireland Cancer Registry (Northern Ireland).



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